

# LET'S Talk

SPRING 2006

HEALTHY BODIES • SOUND MINDS • A SAFE PLACE TO WORK

## Uncle Sam Wants You to Eat Better

**EVEN PYRAMIDS WEAR OUT.** After the government wrote new diet guidelines, the Food Guide Pyramid needed a serious overhaul. The result: MyPyramid, unveiled in 2005 with a new look and approach.

MyPyramid drives home the need to eat your fruits, veggies and whole grains while trimming fat from dairy products. The builders added stairs to show the vital role of exercise. And since our lives aren't one-size-fits-all affairs, MyPyramid lets you fine-tune your diet and exercise plans based on your own calorie needs and fitness level.

MyPyramid focuses on high-quality choices and measures quantity in terms like cups and ounces. The old pyramid used portion sizes, which confused a lot of us. It also failed to list the healthiest choices in basic food categories. Now it's clear that not all carbs or fats are created equal. We're also warned that we can't eat more calories than we burn without gaining weight. These are all steps in a positive direction.

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## The Secret of Being Content

**IT'S IN THE DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE:** the right to the pursuit of happiness. We believe we deserve to be happy. But what does being happy really mean, and how can we achieve it?

Happiness is the overall sense of being satisfied with your life as a whole.

In general, counselors agree that three qualities seem to drive happiness:

- 1 Autonomy (a sense that you've chosen to do what you do)
- 2 Competence (you're good at what you do)
- 3 Relatedness (you feel close to others)

In general, if you're happy, you feel confident and in control. You're more optimistic, energetic, decisive and creative. You view the world as a safer place than those who aren't happy. You have high self-esteem and a sense of meaning to your life. You're more capable of intimacy with others.



Your happiness potential is a bit like your cholesterol level. Both are influenced genetically, as well as by diet, sleep and exercise. Your emotional attitude and the quality of your relationships with others also affect happiness.

There is some indication that people older than 60 are happier than they were when they were younger. Why? Because, in their later years, they're likely to pursue goals based on personal fulfillment rather than obligation.

## Steps to a Happier Life

- Think and act happy. You will create that state of mind for yourself and inspire it in others.
- Take control. Make effective changes in your life.
- Set goals that urge you forward, yet are still realistic.
- Engage your skills. Seek activities that use your abilities.
- Be healthy. Eat well, exercise regularly and get plenty of sleep.
- Surround yourself with happy people and nurture these relationships.
- Be compassionate and help those in greater need.
- Stay open to new people and experiences so you continue to grow.
- Take a moment each day to reflect on the positive things in your life.

## Late-Breaking Health News

**>>People who exercise can add more than three years to their lives,** and their hearts reap benefits from something as simple as brisk walking a half hour a day, according to two studies published in the *Archives of Internal Medicine*.

In one study, researchers analyzed more than four decades of data from the Framingham Heart Study. The researchers grouped 4,121 people into three levels of physical activity: low, medium and high. Life expectancy at age 50 for the medium-activity group was 1.5 years longer than for the low-activity group. The high-activity group lived 3.5 years longer.

In the second study, researchers examined what type of walking program would improve heart health. They found walking for 30 minutes three or more days a week, either moderately or briskly, improved cardiovascular fitness.

**>>Mental illness exacts an enormous toll on U.S. workers.** Employees with anxiety and depressive disorders work fewer hours, are more likely to end up on disability and are less productive than employees without these disorders, according to a study published in the *Journal of Occupational and Environmental Medicine*.

The study also found anxiety and/or depression complicate other medical conditions and seem to have a ripple effect in the workplace, creating low morale among coworkers and a higher turnover rate.

Evidence shows that one of every 20 Americans will be depressed in a given year, and major depression will be the second-leading cause of disability in the year 2020. Anxiety disorders affect 29 percent of Americans in their lifetimes.



**>>Direct delivery of music into ears can cause irreversible hearing loss.**

If other people can hear the music when you're wearing headphones or ear buds while using a personal listening device such as an MP3 player, then it's too loud, according to Barbara McLay, clinical associate professor at the University of Missouri-Columbia School of Health Professions.

It's also important to give the ears a break, she says. Listening to music the majority of the day, even at moderate levels, can still have a significant damaging effect.

"Noise-induced hearing loss sneaks up on people. Someone can have hearing loss and not realize it because it starts in the higher frequencies," says McLay. "Typically, the hearing loss is gradual, but over time it begins to sound like people are mumbling. There is no treatment; once you have this type of hearing loss, it's permanent and all you can do is keep it from getting worse."

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# The Link Between Depression and Suicide

## FROM THE RICH AND FAMOUS —

Ernest Hemingway, Marilyn Monroe, Kurt Cobain — to the person around the corner, suicide claims the life of one American every 17 minutes. In 2002 (the last year for which national statistics are available), there were 31,655 suicides in the United States, making it the 11th leading cause of death. It occurs across all ethnic, economic, social and age boundaries. Women are about three times more likely than men to attempt suicide, but men are four times more likely than women to die from suicide.

## Depression can be the catalyst

A major depressive illness can often lead to suicide. It is estimated that two-thirds of people who complete suicide suffer from depression at the time of their deaths.

People who are depressed and have the following symptoms are at high risk for suicide:

- Hopelessness
- Rage, uncontrolled anger, seeking revenge
- Acting reckless or engaging in risky activities, seemingly without thinking
- Feeling trapped, as if there's no way out
- Increasing alcohol or drug use
- Withdrawing from friends, family and society
- Anxiety, agitation, inability to sleep or sleeping all the time
- Giving away prized possessions
- Dramatic mood changes
- Expressing no reason for living or no sense of purpose in life

## You can help

If you suspect someone is contemplating suicide, there are ways to help.

- **BE AWARE.** Learn the warning signs.
- **GET INVOLVED.** Show interest and support.
- **BE DIRECT.** Ask if he or she is thinking about suicide.
- **BE WILLING** to listen and be nonjudgmental.
- **DON'T ASK WHY.** This encourages defensiveness.
- **OFFER EMPATHY,** not sympathy.
- **OFFER HOPE** that alternatives are available.
- **TAKE ACTION!** Remove means!
- **GET IMMEDIATE HELP** from individuals or agencies specializing in crisis intervention and suicide prevention, such as the National Suicide Prevention Hotline at **1-800-SUICIDE (1-800-784-2433)**, or your EAP at **1-800-222-0364**, any time, 24/7.

## Get immediate help

Call 911 immediately if someone you know exhibits any one or more of the following signs of suicide:

- Threatening to hurt or kill him or herself, or talking of wanting to hurt or kill him or herself
- Looking for ways to kill him or herself by seeking access to firearms, available pills or other means
- Talking or writing about death, dying or suicide, when these actions are not normal for the person

Many suicides are preventable. Knowing the signs and how to help could save the life of someone you know or love.

SOURCES: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, [www.cdc.gov/ncipc](http://www.cdc.gov/ncipc); American Association of Suicidology, [www.suicidology.org](http://www.suicidology.org)

# Speak Up or Stress Out

DO YOU OFTEN FEEL YOU ARE NOT GETTING YOUR NEEDS MET or someone is taking advantage of you? Perhaps you need to stand up for yourself more often.

The failure to be assertive is a key link in the chain that leads to a stress reaction. Over time, stress reactions can lead to consistently higher blood pressure, studies have shown. Stress also can cause headaches and stomachaches.

These seven tips will help overcome stress:

- 1 IDENTIFY BEHAVIOR** you regard as unacceptable.
- 2 TAKE RESPONSIBILITY FOR YOUR FEELINGS.** If you get nervous when you want to speak up, don't block it — feel it. Then get some distance from the feeling, maybe even smile a little, so you can dissolve the stressful emotion and take action.
- 3 EXPECT SOME FEAR.** Changing from passive to assertive behavior may make you feel that people won't like you. But don't worry — assertive people gain their friends' respect.
- 4 PRACTICE.** The need to be assertive often pops up at the worst possible time, so be prepared. Rehearse difficult situations using a mirror or tape recorder.
- 5 REPEAT YOUR POSITION,** simply and clearly, until you're finally heard and acknowledged. Some people won't take no for an answer the first time.
- 6 WAIT UNTIL THE ANGER SUBSIDES BEFORE YOU COMMUNICATE,** so you don't make matters worse.
- 7 SAY YES TO YOURSELF.** Realize you do have the right to express what you think.



## Climb the ladder to assertiveness

This technique is an ideal tool for asserting yourself with someone you see regularly. Here's how it works:

- L** Look at the situation and decide what your rights are and what you'd like to accomplish.
- A** Arrange a good time and place for your discussion.
- D** Define for the other person exactly what's bothering you.
- D** Describe how the situation makes you feel.
- E** Express a request for change in behavior or action.
- R** Reinforce the other person by verbalizing how the change will improve your relationship.

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### It's your choice

Good nutrition requires a personal decision. No one can make you eat well. But experts agree that being exposed to good choices (keep carrots, not cookies, in view) and learning good nutrition guidelines (post them in the kitchen) can help you decide to cleanse your taste buds.

It's never too late to change. Any movement toward a healthful lifestyle will lead to improvement in your health.

### To Learn More

For interactive tools to help you follow the diet guidelines, visit [www.mypyramid.gov](http://www.mypyramid.gov).

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